# Wilmington Police Department

**Directive: .09.12**
**Unmanned Air Support Operations**

CALEA Standards: 41.1.3
NCLEA Standards: 6.18

## I. Purpose

This directive provides guidelines and procedures for the use of the Southeastern North Carolina Air Borne Law Enforcement – Unmanned Aircraft System (SABLE-UAS) Unit. SABLE-UAS is a cooperative-effort, unmanned aircraft unit, that provides extraordinary police services to participating agencies.

## II. Definitions

**A. Southeastern North Carolina Airborne Law Enforcement (SABLE)** – A cooperative-effort air unit, which provides law enforcement services to, but not limited to, New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Wilmington Police Department, Pender County Sheriff's Office and the Leland Police Department.

**B. Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS)** – A system that includes the necessary equipment, network, and personnel to control an unmanned aircraft, weighing less than 55 pounds, and are consistent with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations governing model aircraft.

**C. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)** – The agency of the United States Department of Transportation responsible for the regulation and oversight of civil aviation within the U.S., as well as operation and development of the National Airspace System. Its primary mission is to ensure safety of civil aviation.

**D. Unmanned Aircraft (UA) or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV)** – An aircraft that is intended to navigate in the air without an on-board pilot. Also referred to as a "drone".

**E. Unmanned Aircraft Pilot** – A person exercising control over a UA/UAV/UAS during flight. The "pilot" or "operator".

**F. Payload Capabilities** – what the drone is capable of carrying.

## III. Procedures

### A. UAS Missions

1. The SABLE-UAS Unit utilizes unmanned aircraft (drones) to directly

support and assist emergency service functions.

2. SABLE-UAS services may be utilized for the following:

   a. Search for lost, missing or stranded persons
   b. SWAT/Negotiation situations
   c. Major disturbances (hurricane relief, flooding, riots, etc.)
   d. Vehicular accidents
   e. Outdoor crime scenes
   f. Manhunts
   g. Fire scenes
   h. Other life-threatening situations
   i. Aerial surveillance
   j. Photographic missions
   k. Aerial security
   l. Participation in community-oriented events

3. Surveillance operations of suspects, buildings, vehicles, and roadways are a capability of the air unit. However, depending upon the location and circumstances, a search warrant may be required prior to conducting the operation. Mission requests for surveillance operations will be made through the requesting investigator's chain of command and legal counsel shall be consulted. The respective Division Commander will make the final determination on whether or not the surveillance request will be forwarded to the UAS unit for mission consideration.

4. Supervisors shall coordinate a mission request with the SABLE-UAS Supervisor for the following:

   a) Photographic missions for planning, analysis, surveying, or evidence gathering.
   b) Aerial security for VIPs and foreign dignitaries.
   c) Participation in community-oriented events, media events, or unit demonstrations.

## B. Limitations

1. SABLE-UAS has limited over-water capabilities.
2. UAS operations are limited by weather and wind conditions.
3. UAS is limited by airspace height restrictions, the distance between the UAS and the UAS Pilot, and obstructions.
4. Each individual UAS has its own specific limitations regarding thermal and payload capabilities and flight duration.

## C. Mission Requests

1. When a SABLE-UAS Pilot is on duty, mission requests can come from any supervisor and can be made via radio, telephone, or any other appropriate communication.

2. When no SABLE-UAS Pilot is on duty, emergency call outs will be initiated by the on-duty Watch Commander or higher authority. Before calling out SABLE-UAS, the Watch Commander or person of higher authority should take current weather conditions into consideration. If it is foggy, raining, extremely windy, etc., the SABLE-UAS unit may not be able to take off. Once the Watch Commander has decided that SABLE-UAS is needed, and that the weather is not an issue, they shall make their request for a call out mission. Requests can be made by contacting the WPD Front Desk to have them make contact with the on-call UAS Pilot or the UAS Supervisor.
3. The Pilot will make the determination whether the flight will be initiated. The Pilot should consider weather conditions over the applicable area of the mission request. The Pilot's recommendation as to the safety of the requested mission shall be the ultimate deciding factor pertaining to the use of the UAS for any mission (on duty or call out).

**NOTE: Some areas of the city, specifically areas close to the airport or along the approach patterns for Wilmington International Airport, are restricted airspace. Missions within those areas will be somewhat limited. These restrictions will be dependent upon the mission request.**

## D. Safety Considerations

1. **No person shall approach the UAS while its propeller is turning unless directed to do so by the Remote Pilot.**

2. When the UAS is landing or taking off, ground officers should clear a circular perimeter of no less than 10 feet in diameter for the landing zone. The landing zone should be clear (as much as possible) of aerial obstructions and loose objects. No person shall be located within this zone while the UAS is on landing approach or preparing to take off. The Visual Observer should inform the Remote Pilot of any possible aerial obstructions within the perimeter of the landing area. Examples of potential obstructions are as follows: power lines, cell phone towers, trees, etc.

## E. UAS Accident/Emergency Procedures

**1.** Any inflight or ground accident or emergency shall be immediately reported to the UAS Supervisor for follow-up action.

**2.** Flight data will be entered into the Safety Management System documenting all required flight operations information, to include any accident or emergency actions or conditions.

**3.** Any damage that occurs to a drone or other UAS equipment during an operation, training session or other UAS activity, shall be

documented on a WPD-49 City of Wilmington Property Loss Report.

**4.** Any damage to the personal property of a citizen that occurs during any UAS operation, training session or other UAS activity, shall be documented on a WPD-66 Citizen Property Loss Report.

**5.** Any injury to a person that occurs during any UAS operation, training session or other UAS activity, shall be documented on a WPD Incident Report (Miscellaneous).

**6.** Crash Notification Procedures for the UAS Supervisor when injury or damage to personal property occurs:

**a.** Notify the agency head.
**b.** Contact the FAA through FAA Drone Zone or the Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) at (336) 369-3900.
**c.** Complete all applicable WPD reports (WPD-49, WPD-66, Incident Report).
**d.** In compliance with 14 C.F.R. §107.9 (sUAS Part 107), the UAS Supervisor shall, no later than 10 calendar days after an operation, report to the FAA, any operation of a small unmanned aircraft involving:

i. Serious injury to any person or any loss of consciousness; or

ii. Damage to any property, other than the small unmanned aircraft, unless one of the following conditions is satisfied:

a. The cost of repair (including materials and labor) does not exceed $500;or

b. The fair market value of the property does not exceed $500 in the event of total loss.

**7.** Investigative Resources needed by FAA/NTSB

a) Complete historical UAS fight/maintenance records are located in the UAS Unit’s Safety Management System.